

7359-6.JVD.303973/Group Art Unit 1732

IN THE CLAIMS

The following claims are pending in the above-referenced patent application:

1-27 (cancelled)

28. (Amended) A method of vacuum thermoforming a container which includes an outer surface including an outwardly-projecting ridge, the container further including a base, side walls, and an inwardly-projecting cut lip, the method comprising [the steps of] :

- (a) providing a three-part mold defining a cavity conforming in shape to the outer surface of the container, the cavity including an undercut portion corresponding to the ridge of the container, the mold including separable first, second and third portions, the first portion including a planar upper surface and an upper lip, the first portion defining an upper part of the undercut portion, the second portion defining a lower part of the undercut portion and further defining a surface corresponding to the side walls of the container, the first and second portions of the mold being separable along a part line corresponding to the outermost extent of the ridge of the container, the third portion defining a surface corresponding to the base of the container;
- (b) positioning a heated sheet of thermoplastic material over the mold;
- (c) drawing the heated sheet of thermoplastic material over the upper lip of the mold and down into the cavity and into the undercut portion of the mold;
- (d) allowing the sheet of thermoplastic material to cool below its glass transition temperature to assure that it will retain its shape;
- (e) cutting the thermoplastic material along the upper lip of the mold to separate the drawn thermoplastic material in the mold cavity from the remainder of the thermoplastic material, the separated, drawn thermoplastic material constituting the thermoformed container;

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(f) separating the first and second portions of the mold; and
(g) removing the thermoformed container from the second and third portions of the mold.

29. (New) The method of claim 28 wherein the cavity includes at least one ejector pin for pushing the formed thermoplastic material from the cavity prior to said removing.

30. (New) The method of claim 28 wherein the cavity is shaped so that the separated thermoplastic material is a shell having a base surrounded by integrally formed side walls extending upward to a cut lip, the walls and base formed of a single thermoplastic sheet and defining a volume, the cut lip extending inward about the volume.

31. (New) The method of claim 30 wherein the cavity is shaped so that the upwardly extending walls include a ridge below the cut lip, the ridge protruding away from the volume.

32. (New) The method of claim 31 wherein the cavity is shaped so that the ridge is sized to support the shell on a lower surface of the ridge against a cut lip of a second identical shell with the bases of the two shells spaced apart when the shell is nested within the second identical shell.

33. (New) The method of claim 32 wherein the cavity is shaped so that the ridge has at least one wall obtusely angled with respect to an adjoining portion of the side wall so that a gap is formed between ridges of the two shells when they are nested.

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34. (New) The method of claim 30 wherein the cavity is shaped so that the upwardly extending walls include a ridge below the cut lip, the ridge protruding away from the volume and extending around the entire periphery of the upwardly extending walls.

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